Tier 1 Exceptional Talent: Overview

This guide details the eligibility criteria and process for the Tier 1 Exceptional Talent visa route to assist departments/faculties/colleges in making an informed decision about applying for a visa under this route.

What is Tier 1 Exceptional Talent?

Tier 1 Exceptional Talent is a visa route for leaders and emerging leaders in the fields of science, humanities, engineering, medicine, digital technology and the arts.

The visa route is split into two categories:

- Exceptional Talent: for those who are already proven leaders in their field of expertise.
- Exceptional Promise: for early-career individuals who have demonstrated potential to become leaders in their field of expertise.

What are the benefits of a Tier 1 visa?

Many individuals who require a visa to work at Oxford come to the University on a Tier 2 visa. However, Tier 1 Exceptional Talent has a number of benefits over Tier 2:

- **Greater flexibility on hours of work, place of work, salary, leave and engagement with other organisations.** Those on Tier 2 visas are restricted to working in the specific role, location etc. and are prohibited from taking more than four weeks unpaid leave in any calendar year. There are no such restrictions on a Tier 1 Exceptional Talent visa.

- **More scope for visa extensions.** A Tier 2 visa may be extended to a maximum six years. There are currently no restrictions on extending a Tier 1 Exceptional Talent visa.

- **More cost effective.** Applicants can make a significant cost savings when applying for a Tier 1 Exceptional Talent visa including NHS Surcharge fees compared to a Tier 2 visa of the same duration, particularly where the individual has dependants.

Application process

Departments/colleges are required to complete an internal application form so the Staff Immigration Team (SIT) can assess the individual’s eligibility before they complete the Home Office stage 1 endorsement application.

**Stage 1: Application for endorsement** from a designated ‘Competent Body’:

British Academy, Royal Society, Royal Academy of Engineering: see Research & Innovation Talent criteria below.

Arts Council England, Tech City UK please contact SIT directly in relation to these specialisms as the criteria differs.

An application is submitted to the Home Office in the UK.

**Stage 2: Visa application.** Most individuals submit this stage overseas. Individuals holding a Tier 2, Tier 1 or Tier 5 (Sponsored Researcher) visa can apply to switch in the UK.

How long does an application take?

**Stage 1:** up to eight weeks. Individuals can travel whilst the Stage 1 application is being processed as it does not require submission of their passport. If the endorsement application is declined it will not be counted as a visa refusal.

**Stage 2:** for overseas applicants it depends on the country of application but usually not more than four weeks and priority services may be available. For applicants in the UK up to eight weeks, or an application can be made in person for a premium fee.

This application must be submitted within 3 months of receiving the Stage 1 endorsement.

Please note: The lengthiest part of the application can be gathering the evidence needed to support the Stage 1 application, departments/colleges and applicants should gather this evidence as soon as possible after making the decision to apply for Tier 1.

Stage 1 – ‘Research & Innovation Talent’ Criteria

The British Academy, the Royal Society and the Royal Academy of Engineering have three routes for endorsement:

1. **Standard criteria** – full application to evidence the criteria as outlined on the following page.

Accelerated routes with a guarantee of endorsement:


   This includes fellowships awarded by Research Councils UK, Wellcome Trust, British Heart Foundation, Cancer Research UK, and the UK National Academies.

3. **Senior academic appointments** to Associate Professor, Professor or Reader at a UK HEI where specific recruitment criteria has been met.

The accelerated route provides a simple Stage 1 online application, minimal supporting documents and a 5 week processing time.
Standard criteria

*(Not applicable for the accelerated routes; specific peer-reviewed fellowships or senior academic appointments)*

The table below shows the eligibility criteria for the Exceptional Talent or Exceptional Promise application:

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<th>Exceptional Talent</th>
<th>Exceptional Promise</th>
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<td>Active researcher in a relevant field within a university, research institute or industry.</td>
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<td>Have a PhD or equivalent research experience.</td>
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<td>Provide a letter of personal recommendation from an eminent person resident in the UK supporting the application. They must be familiar with the individual’s work, be able to comment on the contribution to their field, and assess the claim to be a world leader.</td>
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<td>Meet one or more of the following qualifying criteria:</td>
<td>Be at an early stage in their research career. There is no defined timeframe for what constitutes “early stage” but typically, someone less than 10 years post-PhD might be considered to be at an early-stage.</td>
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<td>- Be a member of your national academy or a foreign member of academies of other countries (in particular any of the UK national academies);</td>
<td>Has been awarded, hold, or have held in the past five years, a prestigious UK-based Research Fellowship, international Fellowship or advanced research post.</td>
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<td>- Have been awarded a prestigious internationally recognised prize;</td>
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<td>- Provide a letter of recommendation from a reputable UK organisation concerned with research in your field. This is usually provided by the Head of Division, or in some cases, the VC.</td>
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To apply individuals need to complete an online application, short CV, and personal statement and submit supporting evidence to meet the above criteria.

The application will be assessed by two fellows from the relevant Competent Body. In particular, the panel will look at:

- Career history and international standing including the significance of publications, prizes and research funding.
- The strength of the letters of support from personal recommendation and Oxford.
- The significance of the contribution to their field relative to their career stage.
- The expected ongoing benefits of the individual’s presence in the UK in terms of their contribution to UK research excellence and to the wider society, including potential economic benefits.

**Exceptional Talent or Exceptional Promise?**

When deciding which criteria the individual should apply under, consider:

- **Publications.** Is the number of publications considered exceptional in relation to their career stage? Have they published in highly regarded media?
- **Career history.** Have they held in the past five years a prestigious UK-based Research Fellowship, an international Fellowship or an advanced research post of equivalent standing? How has their career progressed since their PhD?
- **Research impact over the past ten years.** Has their research been quoted widely in the media, has it influenced national/international policy or technology, has it reformed a particular area of science or revealed important results or questions for the future? Do they have any patents or spin-outs?
- **Prizes and awards.** Does the individual hold any internationally recognized prizes or awards? What is the significance of the prize/award?
- **Funding.** How much funding has the individual secured over the past ten years for their research? Is this significant in relation to their field of expertise?
- **International standing.** Is the individual’s work recognised internationally? Do they hold any senior international advisory or consultancy roles?

For further information see the Staff Immigration Team website: [http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/personnel/permits/tier1/exceptionaltalent/](http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/personnel/permits/tier1/exceptionaltalent/)

Application fees: [https://www.gov.uk/tier-1-exceptional-talent/overview](https://www.gov.uk/tier-1-exceptional-talent/overview)